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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Short but Positive Meeting on Nuclear Forensics Cooperation

11. (SBU) Summary: In a short but positive meeting at the Institute of Nuclear Physics (INP) on April 21, INP officials signaled their receptivity to cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) on nuclear forensics. (Note: Nuclear forensics involves the joint collection, analysis, and evaluation of isotopic and chemical signatures from uranium sites in order to support efforts to determine the source, origin, route, and responsibility for illicit trafficking. End note.) This cooperation may improve Uzbekistan's current nuclear detection architecture by enhancing its ability to determine the origin, route, and responsibility for illicit trafficking in nuclear materials and help characterize their own material. INP personnel welcomed the reestablishment of scientific ties between DOE/LLNL and INP. Future nuclear forensics cooperation may include information exchanges on analytic methods, joint nuclear forensic analysis of uranium samples, collaboration on the development of standard operating procedures, and raising awareness of nuclear and radiological threats in Uzbekistan. INP appeared receptive to follow-on discussions in the near future on nuclear forensics. End summary.

Meetings Truncated Due to "Anti-Crisis Measures"

12. (SBU) On April 21, a visiting U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)/Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) team met with five Institute of Nuclear Physics (INP) officials including Director Umar Salikhbaev and Leading Researcher Vitaliy Petrenko to discuss nuclear forensics cooperation. Though two full days of meetings had been scheduled, Director Salikhbaev regretfully indicated that the meetings would have to be condensed into less than four hours that day due to an April 29 "innovation fair" that Uzbekistan has organized as part of its anti-crisis economic program. INP's leadership was being pulled into intensive preparations related to the fair starting that afternoon, which would include meetings with energy and health officials and representatives of the Navoi Metallurgical Combine.

Nuclear Forensics Proposal

¶3. (SBU) The U.S. side noted that the United States and Uzbekistan had signed a Master Task Agreement (MTA) in May 2005 (valid until September 30, 2010) to conduct meetings and workshops to promote regional security through nuclear forensics cooperation. (Comment: The deterioration in bilateral relations in 2005 had precluded joint nuclear forensics work in the wake of the agreement's conclusion. End comment.) The U.S. team complimented Uzbekistan on the leadership it has shown in counterproliferation and expressed interest in reestablishing scientific ties between the U.S. Department of Energy, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, and Uzbekistan's Institute of Nuclear Physics. Nuclear forensics cooperation may advance Uzbekistan's ability to analyze suspect materials at the country's points of entry and augment Uzbekistan's existing nuclear detection architecture. Through nuclear forensics, Uzbekistan may determine where materials detected at radiation portal monitors (or found in other ways) are from as well as determine the threat such materials pose to public health and the environment.

Uzbekistan's Capabilities

TASHKENT 00000649 002 OF 003

¶4. (SBU) Director Salikhbaev replied that everyone at the Institute of Nuclear Physics supports stronger ties with the U.S. Department of Energy. Vitaliy Petrenko, noting that he was familiar with the first two elements of nuclear forensics-detection and primary analysis-delivered a presentation on Uzbekistan's detection capabilities and welcomed U.S. assistance in developing this. Uzbekistan has 175 radiation portal monitors: 118 vehicle monitors distributed among 19 vehicle points of entry; 40 rail monitors among 10 rail points; 12 monitors at Tashkent airport; two at the State Customs Committee Institute; and three at the Institute of Nuclear Physics. He showed a map of Uzbekistan depicting the locations of these monitors, which are particularly dense at Uzbekistan's border with Kazakhstan near Tashkent. Petrenko described INP's role in training Customs officers and several recent instances of radiation detection at Uzbekistan's borders, appearing particularly proud that the train with radioactive materials bound for Iran from Kyrgyzstan in November 2007 was detected at Nazarbek after having passed through two other countries undetected. Uzbekistan's policy has been to ship radioactive materials back to their point of origin.

¶5. (SBU) Another specialist named Ilkhom Sadikov delivered a presentation on Uzbekistan's nascent nuclear forensics program. Uzbekistan's radioanalytic center and mobile labs have conducted some 30 chemical analyses of various materials between 2005 and ¶2009. While these facilities can identify unknown materials and Uzbekistan has the capability to conduct such tests almost anywhere in the country, the creation of a database to keep track of uranium sources and origins would be valuable. Sadikov stressed that such a database should involve representatives from all over Central Asia, and that participation from Uzbekistan alone would be insufficient. The Uzbek side also noted certain shortfalls with detection equipment: Uzbekistan's equipment can give only an approximate level of enrichment of uranium materials and assessing plutonium is more difficult. Uzbekistan also is unable to conduct crystallographic analysis. They have optical microscopes, but no electromicroscopes which would be better for nuclear forensics.

Interested in Further Dialogue

16. (SBU) The U.S. side elaborated on what nuclear forensics cooperation for the next few years would entail. This would revolve around five tasks: First would be the exchange of nuclear forensic analytical techniques between Lawrence Livermore National Lab and INP. LLNL would provide descriptions of methodologies for analysis of uranium ores, uranium ore concentrates, and residual materials to INP. INP would provide a similar list and descriptions of similar methods in Uzbekistan. Salikhbaev responded that there would be no problem in such an information exchange. The second task would be the pursuit of a comparative bilateral nuclear forensic analysis using a common sample exchanged between the U.S. and Uzbekistan. INP and LLNL would jointly select an Uzbek sample of uranium to analyze for forensic signatures at both institutions. The U.S. is especially interested in Uzbekistan's yellow cake, which is a higher-consequence material with a greater potential for illicit trafficking. Salikhbaev stated that INP has no direct access to yellow cake and would require permission from Navoi Metallurgical Combine for this. He added that INP could request this directly from the combine during meetings with their representatives the following day, and also suggested that the U.S. consider sending its samples to Uzbekistan, to which the U.S. did not agree. Third, LLNL would collaborate with Uzbek scientific experts at Uzbekistan's radiological lab to develop standard operating procedures in nuclear forensics. Fourth, LLNL and INP would work together to identify five to ten Uzbek samples of uranium that are promising for nuclear forensic analysis. Fifth, both sides would assess the existing state of public awareness of threats from nuclear and radioactive materials and work to develop technical training related to radiation science, nuclear forensics, and national response. The U.S. side

TASHKENT 00000649 003 OF 003

mentioned that this may also be of interest to the International Atomic Energy Association. Salikhbaev responded that Uzbekistan is working with Pacific Northwest National Lab on a course for Uzbek law enforcement officials on dual-use commodities, and suggested that such proposals be coordinated through Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent.

17. (SBU) Both sides suggested meeting in the near future, perhaps in September on the margins of a physics conference in Tashkent, to discuss nuclear forensics cooperation further. The U.S. side noted that for this particular initiative, DOE will not pay for equipment for or salaries of Uzbek personnel, but the expertise of LLNL would be made available to INP as appropriate. Salikhbaev welcomed direct contact between DOE/LLNL and INP personnel.

Comment:

18. (SBU) This was a productive first meeting that appears to have laid the groundwork for nuclear forensics cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan, and the positive tone of the discussions suggests that Uzbekistan will be receptive to at least some elements of the nuclear forensics proposal. Uzbekistan clearly has the scientific expertise and capabilities to be a strong partner in nuclear forensics, and INP's rhetoric about the importance of regional cooperation on cataloguing uranium sources is encouraging. Nevertheless, it is unclear at this point whether higher-level decision-makers in Uzbekistan will share INP's views. Uzbekistan's sometimes prickly relations with neighboring Central Asian states and mutual distrust could limit the effectiveness of some aspects of this cooperation, such as the proposal to create a database of uranium sources to be shared between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

NORLAND